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Book Reviews

Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the Book Review Editor, Dennis L. Johnson, at <1_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

In the northern forests

We Made It Through the Winter, A Memoir of Northern Minnesota Boyhood, by Walter O'Meara, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1974, 128 pages, softcover, ill. Amazon.com, 1987, $13.25 plus shipping.

This is a delightfully appealing memoir of a nine-year-old boy living in a small logging town in northern Minnesota in the year 1906. The town was Cloquet, about fifteen miles west of Duluth on the St. Louis River. This book was especially appealing to this reviewer since I, too, lived in Cloquet for a few years, 1938-1942. I was about his age, but lived there some 35 years later. The town was supposedly named after an earlier French-Canadian trapper who lived in the area long before 1906. The population at the time was about three thousand people and the largest ethnic group was Scandinavians, among whom nearly half were Swedish.

Cloquet was founded in the 1880's, incorporated as a village in 1884, and became a city in 1904. Located on the St. Louis River below where several tributaries joined, it was ideally situated to develop as a logging town, with good access to the pine forests of the region, and water to power several sawmills by the river. Pine was cut in the forests in the winter, pushed into the streams in the spring, and floated downriver to Cloquet where it was sorted and cut into lumber to meet the enormous demand from growing Midwestern cities. Much of the lumber was shipped from the nearby port of Duluth to Chicago, Detroit, and many other cities on the Great Lakes.

The author's father was one of the many workers who came to Cloquet to work in the logging industry. He would spend most of the winters up in the woods, while his family stayed in Cloquet without him, then returned in the spring to work in the big mills, making lumber out of the logs cut in the winter. The O'Meara's were mostly Irish, but the loggers were from many other ethnic groups, many of them newly arrived immigrants. The lumber company owners and bosses were largely English and Scots-Irish, or German, having been in America longer and more experienced at the skills needed. The loggers were new and many did not yet speak English.

In vivid detail, the author sets the scene for his memoirs by describing the area, the logging business, and their life in Cloquet. The first chapters deal with getting through the winter without a father present. Their house, the big wood-burning stove, their kitchen, foods and food preservation, his chores, an icy cold outhouse, and all that was needed to survive the subzero temperatures of northern Minnesota, and the trials of deep winter portray the typical family's struggles to survive in this time period.

The coming of spring changes their life completely. His father returns home, school is out, and the fun times of summer for a young boy are described in rich, engaging prose. The day can begin going barefoot, fishing, hunting rabbits, exploring, and generally enjoying the outdoors; it will bring back many memories for older readers. Summer visits by relatives, a traveling circus, drifters, traveling salesmen, Fourth of July, picnics, summer sports, and even encounters with traveling Gypsies are all richly described, as are many of his boyhood friends from various ethnic backgrounds. But in 1919 the entire town burned to the ground and cost some 500 lives. The town was built entirely of wood, and only a school, a firehouse, and a few homes escaped.

The author left Cloquet a few years later to further his education. He graduated from Cloquet High School, and then studied at the University of Minnesota and the Univer-

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sity of Wisconsin. After service in World War I as an artillery sergeant, he worked briefly in Duluth as a reporter, then returned to the University of Wisconsin to graduate in 1920. For some fifty years he combined a successful business career with writing about fifteen books, two of them best-sellers. He served again in World War II and then resumed his business career. After retirement, he and his wife lived in Arizona where he continued writing, including this memoir written in 1974. O'Meara died in Cohasset, Mass, in 1989.

My own memories of Cloquet were in many ways similar, but in many ways very different. By World War I the logging business had ended, and many of the workers moved on to the Pacific Northwest, while others found new jobs in iron mining on the Mesabi and Vermilion iron ranges further north. The town grew slowly but by my own years it approached some eight thousand people. Our home was better equipped, with a furnace, indoor bathrooms, and some electric appliances. We now had electricity, a telephone, and a radio, but television was still decades in the future. O'Meara had only seen a few early open horseless carriages; horses still dominated for work and travel. By 1938, my father had an enclosed Chevrolet, with a radio and a heater, as did many households in town. There were few horses, no Gypsies, and no log skirlers. But the St. Louis River was still the color of root beer.

The sawmills no longer ripped lumber from logs, but had turned to making other wood products from second growth softwood trees still abundant in the area. The pine was gone. The "wood conversion plants" made hardboard, paper, cardboard, and other pulpwood products while casting a constant pungent odor over the town which never entirely disappeared. Other businesses and services had sprung up to serve the growing population. One of our summer activities when I lived there was counting the cars on the ore trains passing through Cloquet on their way to Duluth and the steel furnaces in Ohio and points east. I remember counting trains of over a hundred cars some days. That, too, has ended with the decline of iron mining.

The mix of people, however, had not changed much. The town still had a majority of Scandinavians, quite a few Germans, and lesser numbers of many other European nations represented. By 1940, most were second and third generation, socially assimilated, yet still largely keeping to their own churches. My family was there since my father had found work as a teacher and supervisor in one of the many CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps in the area. (The CCC was created by President Roosevelt in 1934 as part of the "New Deal." Many young men unemployed by the Depression were sent to these

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camps to do conservation work, to learn a trade, and to further their education.) This camp was located in a State Park a little ways outside Cloquet. By 1942 the CCC camps were all closed down, the young men mostly were drafted to serve in World War II, and my father was out of a job. We moved then to Minneapolis, where he found other work.

This book about life in Cloquet in 1906 is yet another story of the lives of many immigrant and other workers in that period; a story of hardship, hard work, and hard winters. For the young, however, it was a life of pleasure and privation in strange surroundings. This account, told better than most, is the author's last published book, written "for his family" of four children and many grand- and great-grandchildren. It is an exceptionally entertaining memoir of growing up at that unique time and place in America, a personal story, yet shared in common with many Americans of his generation.

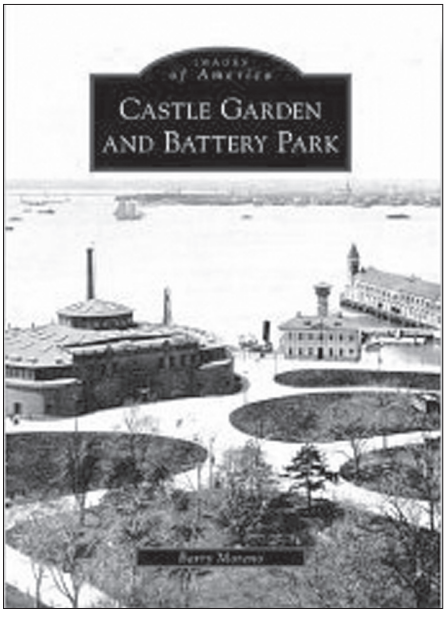
Dennis L. Johnson

The entrance to America

Castle Garden and Battery Park, Images of America series, Barry Moreno, Arcadia Publishing, Chicago, 2007, 128 pages, softcover, illustrated, Amazon.com $17.15 plus shipping.

Castle Garden in New York City offered the first views of America on land for the estimated eight to twelve million immigrants from Europe between 1855 and 1890. Nearly a million of these immigrants came from Sweden. The Garden served as the principal port of entry on the East Coast for immigrants arriving on sailing, and later, steamships, during this period. Another nearby building, the Barge Office, was used temporarily until the Ellis Island arrival center was completed and opened on January 1, 1892.

Castle Garden and Battery Park have had a long and varied history dating to the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam. The strategic position where the Hudson River is merged with the East River gave this location importance as the first view of river traffic arriving from the Atlantic Ocean. With the founding of the settlement of New Amsterdam in 1624, the location was the site for Fort Amsterdam, built to protect the new settlement from marauders and claim the land for the Dutch. By 1683, cannons were placed there thus giving the site the name Battery Park. After American independence, plans began for a fortification in the west battery designed by Architect John McComb. This fortification was completed in 1811; at the end of the war of 1812 with Great Britain, the fort was renamed Castle Clinton, after the then Governor of New York DeWitt Clinton.



Until 1822, Castle Clinton served as headquarters of the U.S. Third Military District, which was then removed to Governor's Island. Castle Clinton was demilitarized and ceded to New York City. During this period the fort was renamed Castle Garden and was roofed over and improved, serving as a promenade, beer garden, exhibit hall, opera house, and theater. A domed rotunda was added in 1844-45. Castle Garden was a major venue for popular concerts and appearances including one by Swedish soprano Jenny Lind in 1850 to open her American tour. As other, larger venues were added in the city, Castle Garden became the immigrant landing station for New York City and New York State, opening in 1855. Originally surrounded on all sides by water with only a connecting drawbridge, additional land fill in the area enlarged Battery Park to completely surround the old structure by land.

In 1886, just four years before the closing of Castle Garden in 1890, the Statue of Liberty was completed and dedicated nearby in New York Harbor. With the opening in 1892 of Ellis Island as a larger and more suitable immigration landing station, Castle Garden became a public aquarium, one of New York's most popular attractions. The aquarium was eventually closed in 1941, and the building was dedicated as a historic site and renamed the Castle Clinton National Monument, rededicated in 1946. It contains a museum, and serves as the departure point for visitors taking ferries to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

The author of *Castle Garden and Battery Park*, Barry Moreno, works in the Museum Services division of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. He has written other articles on Castle Garden and is the author of several other books in this series about Ellis Island, The Statue of Liberty, Children of Ellis Island, and Manhattan Street Scenes. The story

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of Castle Garden and its environs is told through a massive collection of images collected by Moreno.

From colonial origins to the Civil War, the story is told through drawings, paintings, and etchings by artists of the day. Most of the later images are photographs, the camera being available after the middle of the 19th century. The images are all accompanied by extensive captions, helping to tell the story of Castle Garden and the people who passed through this immigration center. The reader can easily imagine an ancestor passing through this building and the jumble of confusion, waiting, and anxiety as thousands of immigrants and their families were processed almost daily.

For most of the period of this use of Castle Garden, immigrants arrived by barge from the piers or anchorages of the ships on which they endured the long voyage from Europe. They entered the building to encounter a number of checkpoints where their identities, origins, and other information were recorded, then on to a physical examination, money exchanging, and other steps. Nearby was a labor exchange, hiring hall, recruiting stations for the military, and missionaries passing out religious tracts in various languages. Railroads and Hudson River boats sold tickets to those traveling to the west, and all sorts of swindlers and confidence men lurked outside the building to try and take advantage of the new arrivals.

The format of the book, using numerous images with captions rather than the usual descriptive text, is very effective in conveying the experience of immigrants during the period of Castle Garden. (A picture is worth a thousand words). For those having an ancestor with the immigrant experience of passing through Castle Garden, this book would be an important addition to the family library. (Since 2005, researchers seeking ancestor arrivals may search the Castle Garden immigration records on **www.CastleGarden.org**).

I think your descendants and especially young children would find the images in this book fascinating and highly educational. Even if your ancestors arrived at another time or another place, the book is an essential portrayal of these immigrants' first encounter with their new land.

Dennis L. Johnson

Maybe a tall story?

> *America's Back Door*, by Vernon Alfred Holmes, Ivy House Publishing Group, Raleigh, NC, 2003, 191 pages, illustrated, hardcover, allbookstores.com, $21.95 + shipping.

This is an interesting but unusual story about the author's family and their emigration from Lotorp, Risinge, Östergötland, to Chicago in 1886.

The first part is about an adventure of the author's grandfather, Erick, at age 7 in the woods in Sweden. The second part describes the family's arriving at the decision to immigrate to America, and the last part is about their perilous voyage across the Atlantic from Göteborg to Chicago, through the Great Lakes. The final part includes family photographs and a family tree of the family in Chicago. The book keeps the reader turning the pages, but leaves one at the end with certain unease about the accuracy of the information that is related in the story.

In the tale, the reader is expected to believe that Erick, a seven-year-old (going on eight), is sent alone into the woods for a week on a hunting and trapping expedition to feed his desperate family. His father is bedridden, injured in an accident, and unable to provide for the family that includes his mother and younger brother Carl, and a sister, Elisabeth. On this trip, he is equipped with a .50 caliber (?) rifle given him by his grandfather. He has a sled with forty beaver traps, some rabbit traps, and other gear. In the course of this trip he encounters wolves, a cougar, badgers, elk, a moose, deer, and two bears, and barely rescues himself from a fall through the ice. The badger has mutilated his six trapped beavers so the pelts are unusable, but the meat will be taken home. He also shoots a wolf, and brings that home for the skin as well. At the end, he shoots a bear at the last minute, only to find a second bear just behind the one he has shot. Another shot rings out, and the second bear has been shot by his grandfather who has just arrived to find him. Between them the grandson and grandfather drag home their entire haul on two sleds.

On their return, all are welcomed joyfully but the episode confirms the futility of continuing to try and farm in Sweden against formidable odds of famine and poverty. Erick's father, Johan, regretfully decides that the family must immigrate to America despite the tears of their grandparents. In 1886, they sell most of their possessions and leave in their ox-drawn wagon with a few supplies and possessions. In Göteborg they seek the first departing ship they can in order not to use up their money on food and lodging. The ship turns out to be an American ship, the *Enrica*, a former man-of-war built for the U.S. Civil War. The captain is

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one John Warden, said by the author to be the one-time captain of the famous *Monitor* and a Civil War hero.

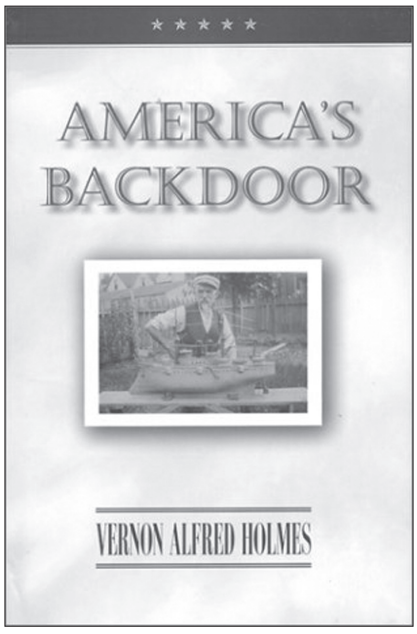
The family sells their team and wagon, pay their passage, and they soon embark on a voyage in steerage, filled with fellow emigrants. The privations of the trip are described in detail: seasickness, disease, deaths, icy cold with ice storms coating the decks above with heavy ice, and many other hazards. The author includes a few stories related by captain Warden along the way, and problems with the irregular and often drunken crew. The voyage takes sixteen weeks and the ship finally arrives in Chicago to let the immigrants debark offshore on ship's boats, due to the shallow lake water. They find their way to "Swedetown" to be taken in by friendly countrymen until they could get settled and find work. It turns out that the ship was filled with "undocumented workers" or, illegal immigrants, since they had bypassed the usual ports of entry.

The family settled in Chicago, where Johan and his wife, Anna Charlotta Boström, had another son, David, and a daughter, Esther, to add to the family. Erick finished growing up in Chicago, worked as a tailor to wealthy Chicagoans, and struck up a friendship with the famous architect, Daniel Burnham. Their name was now Holmes, not Holm, because that is what everyone called them. Erick married Mattie Seidel and had eight children. Erick died suddenly at age 47 of a heart attack. The author, Vernon Alfred, is the son of Erick's third son Raymond. After a long career in packaging, Vernon is now retired and lives with his wife in Spooner, Wisconsin.

With my interest aroused by my unease, I decided to do a little fact-checking on the Holm family and their travels. The family was found in Swedish records. The family record indicated Johan emigrated with his family from Ankarsrums *Bruk*, Hallingeberg, Kalmar *län*. His wife was born in Skedevi, Östergötlands *län*. The Swedish household records note May 18, 1886, as their date of departure from Hallingeberg. *Emigranten* lists the family as emigrating June 18, 1886, from Göteborg, destination New York.

In checking the biography of John Warden, captain of the *Monitor*, I found that he commanded the U.S. Naval Academy 1869-1874 where he was promoted to rear admiral. He then commanded the U.S. European squadron 1875-77, had shore duty 1877-86, and retired from active duty in October, 1887. I think this rules out his having been captain of the *Enrico* in 1886. Would this national hero be reduced to captaining a leaky, old sailing ship (with steam auxiliary propulsion) ferrying poor immigrants from Sweden to Chicago? This is, at best, a case of mistaken identity.

All the ice encountered on the voyage also raises questions, since they embarked in the month of June (18th) with several weeks on the Atlantic in June and July. The ship had passed through the Gulf of St. Lawrence and then through the Great Lakes to Chicago. Locks were completed in 1871 for ships up to 187 ft. long and 44 ½ feet wide, but not enlarged until after World War II. Could their ship have made this passage? I doubt it. More likely they traveled via New York and the Hudson River to the Erie Canal and thence to the Great Lakes by another smaller ship, or overland by train to Chicago. According to the author, Chicago had no immigration station and the immigrants arriving there by ship were undocumented, hence the title of the book, *America's Back Door*.



In an afterword, the author includes a family tree showing his immediate ancestors, and some photographs from his collection. Some historical notes add general information on immigration from Scandinavia, Chicago in the 19th century, and other notes. He lists some famous Swedes, and adds information about Ellis Island. There is a list of source books he used, mostly general about immigration, history, and Sweden. No footnotes occur citing sources for particular facts given in the book, however.

It appears to this reviewer that the author relied more on family legends than he did on careful research and actual facts in composing this book.

But it was a real family and they did make a real pilgrimage in the 1880's to new lives in the American Midwest. Enjoyable to read, *America's Back Door* is another chronicle of a Swedish immigrant family, one which may stimulate other descendants to research and record the sagas of their own families who came to America from Sweden during the great migration. I am not inclined to be too critical of the possible exaggerations or inaccuracies of the story but encourage all who undertake writing about their family his-

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tory to take the time to do their homework thoroughly. Except in unusual circumstances, the facts are mostly available thanks to the abundance of Swedish and U.S. records available online, in archives, and prepared by the genealogical societies in Sweden.

Dennis L. Johnson

Editor's note: In 1886 it was possible to take a train to a port of departure. The voyage usually lasted less than two weeks. Lotorp village, where the Holms did not live, had a big ironworks; there were no wolves, bears, or cougars in the area. Now there are, in the Kolmården Zoo. Please disregard the part about life in Sweden in the 1880s!

Emigrants from Göteborg

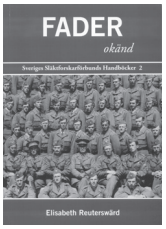
Göteborgs-Emigranten 7, editors: Per Clemensson and Lennart Limberg, published by the Göteborgs-Emigranten Project. 231 pages, ill., softcover, 2010. ISBN 978-91-633-6365-8. Price 100 SEK + postage. More information from <per@clemensson.net>

This new book in the *Göteborgs-Emigranten* series is in ***Swedish***, but can probably be of interest to many that read some Swedish. *Lennart Limberg* has written an article about the early emigration, before 1870, from Scandinavia, which gives information on how and why it started earlier in Norway than in the other Nordic countries. Next *John Persson* writes about Swedish-born sea captains in California, and his list of these men is to be found on a CD that comes with the book. A big part of the *Göteborgs-Emigranten Project* has been to identify and register emigrants that were local and not just passing through. As a result of this work the project now tries to identify immigrants coming into the city, and find out if they originated in Göteborg, as is described by *Lennart Limberg*. The resulting information is found on the CD. *Dr Limberg* has also studied the Swedish emigrants through the German ports, which is the main essay in this volume. *Mathias Nilsson* tells the story behind EmiWeb, which is slowly growing to have more content and becoming more and more useful for emigrant researchers. *Gunvor Flodell* tells much about the little known emigration to Brazil and Argentina in the late 1800s and early 1900s, where there still remain descendants of the Swedes. Her list of these emigrants is also found on the CD. *Ulf Beijbom* writes about Sillgatan, the main street of the emigrant neighborhood in Göteborg, and finally *Per Clemensson* mentions an early emigration booklet from 1867, which is also found on the CD. This is a very useful book.

Elisabeth Thorsell

New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)



The Swedish Federation of Genealogical Societies (*Sveriges Släktforskarförbund*) has recently published a book about the eternal problem "Father unknown" (*Fader okänd*), in ***Swedish***, and written by the former archivist Elisabeth Reuterswärd of Lund. The book offers various suggestions on how to solve this problem. The book costs about 200 SEK + postage at Rötterbokhandeln, *see p. 30.*

The May 2011 issue of the *Family Tree Magazine* (which arrived in March) is a special issue with many articles on how to find information about Civil War soldiers, both Union and Confederate, and tells what is available on-line, and what is still to be found on microfilms and in the archives. They even tell you how to get a tombstone for your soldier who never got one. There are also city guides on how to do research in St. Louis, MO, and Richmond, VA.

Someone might be interested to know that the Genealogical Society of Finland (*Genealogiska Samfundet i Finland*) publishes a journal, called *Genos*, which is now in its 82nd volume. Genos has usually one or two articles in Swedish, but most of the contents are in Finnish. Since a year back they now have little summaries in English, but not any longer in Swedish.

The journal *Sweden & America* (formerly *The Bridge*) is published by the Sweden America Center in Karlstad, Sweden, now in cooperation with Swedish Council of America. The issue 1/2011 has a column by Lars Nordström, a long article on Birger Sandzén, with many nice pictures, by Ron Michael, and on Nils Peter Persson a.k.a. William H. Parsons, who ended up in jail for fraud, by Jeanne Rollberg.